

Istook Chastises Administration's Failure To Support Abstinence

Washington, D.C. — Today, Congressman Ernest Istook (R-OK) told a Cabinet member it is “pathetic” that the Clinton Administration has never proposed a single penny to promote abstinence among teens, and that Clinton’s new budget wants to reduce the funding which Congress established.

Speaking to Donna Shalala, Secretary of Health and Human Services, at a Congressional hearing, Istook said, **"You're in your eighth year now, and you've supported more spending on everything else, yet you've never proposed a single penny to promote abstinence. Congress has stepped in to do that, and now your budget wants to reverse our efforts."**

The Administration's budget released yesterday proposes that funding should be cut by \$11-million in the program promoting abstinence (part of Title XX--Adolescent Family Life) rather than increased by \$20-million as Congress directed in legislation signed into law last fall. Instead, the Administration proposes \$35-million more (a 15% increase) for its Title X programs, which promote so-called "safe sex" and provide contraceptives to teens.

In 1999, Istook was the chief sponsor of the new funding to promote abstinence. The only other federal program promoting teen abstinence was created by Congress as part of welfare reform in 1997, which Clinton refused to sign until the third time Congress sent it to him. As Istook pointedly noted to Shalala, the Clinton Administration has never sought a single additional penny for it, despite inflation. The amount stayed flat, at \$50-million per year, until Istook’s efforts last year to increase it by \$20-million.

In today's hearing, Shalala admitted that her department is refusing to accept applications for the \$20-million in new abstinence grants, but instead proposes to eliminate them.

"President Clinton and Ms. Shalala are willing to spend our tax dollars to provide contraceptives to kids, but not to tell them to wait until marriage. That attitude undercuts what we teach our kids; it has lowered our standards and our values. Teens don't respond to mixed messages; we need a clear message that abstinence is the only sure way to prevent teen pregnancies and sexually-transmitted diseases," said Istook. **"It's sad that the Clinton Administration condones the teen sex that causes disease, unwanted pregnancies and abortions, and that traps young mothers in a cycle of poverty. I won't give up on my efforts to help our youth avoid this, and neither will the rest of the Congress."**